[Review of] Victoria Raymer, The Bible in Worship: Proclamation, Encounter and Response

Victoria Raymer, *The Bible in Worship: Proclamation, Encounter and Response* (London: SCM, 2018), 285 pp. Pbk. £35. ISBN 978–0–334–05647–8.

This book's first part examines the proclamation of Scripture in worship, then the second part offers a critical examination and assessment of modern lectionaries. The tutor in liturgy at Westcott House, Cambridge, Raymer is herself Anglican but works within the ecumenical Cambridge Theological Federation, which also includes Roman Catholic and Reformed institutions, amongst others. Her study is characterized by attentive, lived engagement with traditions other than her own.

In the first three chapters, Raymer surveys Roman Catholic, Reformed and Anglican proclamation of Scripture in turn, highlighting some defining characteristics. i) Roman Catholic churches may not possess a single-volume Bible, because Scripture is provided as individual readings in lectionary books and in the Gospel book. The Psalm is regarded as one of the readings and so is not followed by the *Gloria Patri*. The primary aim of liturgical scriptural reading is to bring worshippers to experience Christ's redemptive acts anew. ii) In Reformed worship, in contrast, the physical Bible at the centre of worship is the focal point, and any cross displayed is probably empty to avoid detracting from this. The Bible may be carried in at the start of worship and, especially where there is a Congregationalist heritage, left open. The Enlightenment prioritization of understanding governs other aspects, including the role of the Spirit as illuminator and detailed, extended exposition in preaching, which encourages hearers to inhabit the scriptural world. The Pastoral Prayer situates the worshippers' immediate and wider world concerns in the scriptural context. The Old Testament may be prominent, with its prophetic and ethical messages in view, and attention may well be given to creation as well as to salvation. iii) In Anglican churches, a lectern Bible including the Apocrypha must be available for the use of the minister and, by extension, for liturgical use. In the Eucharist, some worshippers may bow their heads to acknowledge the name of Jesus or cross themselves at the Gospel. The Gospel book may be preceded in procession by a processional cross to the place of proclamation in the centre of the church.

This overview feels like part of a liturgy module on an ecumenical ministerial formation course, and due to ecumenical liturgical convergence inevitably includes some repetition and overlap. Nevertheless, interesting critical points emerge. In Anglican and, it might be added, other traditions, there is potential for symbolic confusion, as the cross, altar and Gospel book may each be regarded as representing Christ (p. 94). In Anglican practice, the possibility of a short Dismissal Gospel, to emphasize mission, is indeed a recent trend (p. 100). However, this has ancient precedent in the reading of John's Prologue, in which earthly mission is an outworking of divine Trinitarian sending, as the 'Last Gospel' in the 1570 Roman Rite.

Whereas the book's first part is largely descriptive, its second part critically evaluates lectionary compilation and usage. It opens with a short yet suggestive chapter on 'enhanced and interactive' proclamation, which traces contemporary liturgical drama back to eleventh-century England and fifth-century Jerusalem. There is lots more to explore here and one wonders if the author simply ran out of time or words.

Scripture in contemporary daily prayer is then discussed, including psalter collects, and lectionary cycles in several Anglican provinces. There follows another short but instructive excursus on the selection and juxtaposition of readings, which paves the way for two substantial chapters on the Synoptic lectionaries. By these, Raymer means the three-year *Lectionary for Mass* and the eucharistic *Revised Common Lectionary*, which assign one year each to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, but deploy John at Christmas and Easter, because of its theological depth and relevance, and to complement Mark, which is shorter than the other Synoptics. The heady days of ecumenical lectionary convergence, which may be traced from the Second Vatican Council to the launch of the *RCL* on Advent Sunday, 1994, are now sufficiently distant for the narrative of key events and decisions that Raymer furnishes to be extremely useful. These include the rejection of a four-year cycle, tensions over whether to lengthen or 'fillet' readings, and decisions about whether to select passages that foreground a 'Protestant' Paul concerned with mission, faith and narrating personal experience, or a 'Catholic' Paul who acts apostolically and teaches doctrine.

In the following chapter, Raymer draws on, and contributes to, an important body of critical lectionary studies. The issues raised are important because many Christians only hear the Bible read on Sundays: the lectionaries, Raymer avers, have thereby formed a new *de facto* canon. Passages showing Jesus in conflict with public authorities, she states, are omitted, in favour of a Christology of immediate resolution and fulfilment. Creation and wisdom texts, in contrast, are largely ignored—notwithstanding *Common Worship*'s Creation Sunday—while 'women, foreigners, slaves, eunuchs and people with disabilities . . . are disregarded' (p. 189). The *RCL* improves on the *LM* in some of these areas, such as by designating Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene as one of the two alternative Easter Sunday Gospel readings each year. But Raymer contends: 'It is time for Lectionary review.' (p. 226)

The final chapter constitutes a well-founded plea for greater liturgical use of the Psalms. At the the Reformation, the expunging of the propers—which were short scriptural passages, mostly from the Psalms, which were sung or said at different points in worship—from Anglican Holy Communion contributed to the reduction of Scripture in worship. Raymer celebrates the existential quality of Psalmody: 'It releases worshippers from narrow ruts of exclusively indicative and imperative religious thinking where they are unable to cry out or hear the cries of others.' (p. 216) She presents some fascinating material on Psalm translation, describing how the Vulgate gave certain verses (e.g. 69:26, 96:10, 139:18) overtly Christological allusions that go beyond what the texts literally contain. However, these translations are now part of our Christian heritage, shaping theology and liturgical texts. The question of whether the 'liturgical Bible' may be, or should be, reconciled with the 'exegete's Bible' is left unanswered.

Raymer's study opens with a description of the televised 2009 Funeral Mass of Senator Edward Kennedy, which includes the detail that family members read biblical passages from folded pieces of paper (p. 1). In Anglican churches, it would be illuminating to survey church readers to discover why so many insist on walking up to a splendid eagle lectern bearing a wonderful large Bible only to produce a crumpled printout and read from that instead. Does this belie a distrust of

collectively owned books, or of traditions of public reading, or maybe a lack of confidence in locating the passage for reading in the unlikely event that a marker ribbon be moved, and therefore betray a gap in Christian formation? Raymer draws ministers and laypeople into a deeper understanding of Scripture's sacramentality and physicality, helping us interrogate even a seemingly inconsequential aspect of liturgical Bible reading such as this.

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